

Take Off the Old; Put on the New

Thomas Robinson, *Ephesians – Growing Up Into Christ 16*, July 7, 2013

Ephesians 4:15-28

¹⁵ ... By **practicing the truth in love**, we are to **grow up** in every way **into him** who is **the head**, the **Messiah**, ¹⁶ **from whom the whole body** (carefully **joined** together and **held** together by every **ligament** of support, when **each one** of the parts is **working as it should**) **creates the body's growth** for building itself up **in love**.

¹⁷ Now this **I say and testify** in the Lord,

that you must **no longer walk as the Gentiles walk**,
in their **futility of the mind**,

¹⁸ being darkened in their understanding,

because they are **alienated from the life of God**

due to the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.

¹⁹ Since they have **lost sensitivity**,

they have given themselves up to self-abandonment

to practice every kind of corruption, **always wanting more**.

²⁰ But it is not for that way of life that **you learned** (became disciples of) **the Messiah**,

²¹ if indeed you **listened to him** and were **instructed in him** –

by seeing **truth as it is in Jesus** –

²² to **take off the old self** (person, *anthropos*), [Rom 6:6; Col 3:9]

which belongs to your **former way of life**

and is being corrupted through deceitful desires,

²³ and to **be renewed** in the **spirit of your minds**,

²⁴ and to **put on the new self** (person, *anthropos*), [Eph 2:15]

created after the likeness of God

with a justice and holiness that belongs to truth.

²⁵ Therefore, having taken off the lie,

speak truth, each with your neighbor,

for we are **members one of another**.

²⁶ Be **angry** and do **not sin**;

do not let the sun go down on your anger,

²⁷ and give no room for the devil (the slanderer).

²⁸ Let those who steal **no longer steal**,

but rather **work**, accomplishing something **good** with their own hands,

so that they may **have something to share with anyone in need**.

Ephesians 2:3-5

³ ... We all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature **children of wrath, like the rest of mankind**. ⁴ But **God**, being rich in mercy, because of the **great love** with which **he loved us**, ⁵ even when **we were dead** in our trespasses, **made us alive together with Christ** – by **grace** you have been **saved**.

2 Corinthians 5:17

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is **in Christ** – a **new creation!** The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Old and New

The message of the Gospel is not for self-help in improving this and that. Jesus tells a religious leader he must be born from above/anew. It speaks of a new identity, being crucified with Christ, dying, rising; filled with the fullness of God, a new creation. Radical images based on God's work for us in Jesus and in us through the Holy Spirit. But God brings about real change, repentance, renewal, new ways of life. Not based on our will-power and striving, but growing from the inside out as the Gospel takes hold of our mind, imagination, and will. Paul is writing to Gentiles (non-Jews), to aid that growth by helping them grasp the Gospel. They have experienced radical change, but the old ways are still deep habits of culture. He calls them to look back and see where they were, with a clarity they could not have before: Futility, darkness, alienation from God's life, closed minds, numbness of addiction. We didn't realize it, but "we were dead." Seeing God's profound love in Jesus has wakened us from the dead, given us light, hope, healing, renewal, a community based on real love. Paul solemnly urges them that they must not go back but grow more into their new life.

The Change

In vv20-21 Paul talks about their initial process of conversion [difficult grammar, strange translations]. They knew they were called to a new life when they became learners (disciples) of the Messiah of Israel, called to new promises by the unknown, living God. But learning/discipleship means really listening, receiving instruction from Jesus in the Gospel, realizing that it is in Jesus that the truth of the universe and everyday life is revealed. In him God is revealed, we are revealed, the meaning of all life is embodied.

We must make a choice. God provides all the means, but he never forces us. Paul calls believers to take off "the old self" (*anthropos*). We can't do that by ourselves, but with God it's possible. But we must choose, act, open ourselves to God's transforming work. We must "be renewed" by God's work, in the deepest core of our being (spirit of my mind).

We put on "the new self." In one sense it is a miraculous moment, a gift of grace. In another it is the wonderful quest of a lifetime, always growing, always renewed. We receive Jesus' life (Gal 2:20), God's Holy Spirit. But we must actively put on that new life. God's aim is not to conquer us but for us to grow into the fullness for which he created us: in Jesus. Look at Jesus. We see Truth. We see real righteousness/justice and holiness. Live it!

New Pathways

A new walk opens before us not based on fear, pride, and greed but from this new identity.

Paul begins a series with three brief pointers showing how newness is embodied in us.

Truth. We took off "the lie" with that old self. So much of ordinary identity is built by lying to ourselves and others. We learn to speak truth by being truthful with those close at hand.

In that truthfulness, removal of masks, we honor each other as part of the same body.

Anger. Not a resolution never to get angry, but never to give control to anger, rage, grudges, victimhood, unforgiveness, etc. Send it away. Don't let it hold you and become a slanderer.

Stealing. Your way of life should be generosity. Work, not just to make money for yourself but to accomplish good through your work and to be able to be generous to others.